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ABSTRACT

The paper outlines the advantages of fixed term appointments for graduate school deans, discusses the character of decanal leadership, and explores the place of power and authority within leadership. Decanal leadership is described as the process by which deans induce faculty, students, university administrators, and alumni to further the educational goals that embody the shared values and aspirations of the graduate school. Types of leadership roles are described, including manager, mover and shaker, diplomat, and missionary. Ten decanal do's and don'ts are offered, such as "be frugal in your call on faculty expertise," "take advantage of the latent benefits of committee memberships," "define your priorities early and stick to them," and "seek the advice of legal counsel, but treat it as advisory." (JDD)

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In October, 1989, after five years of service, Gillian Lindt left the graduate deanship at Columbia University to return to her role as professor in the Department of Religion. During her time as dean, she was an articulate and passionate advocate for graduate education, not just in her university, but nationally as well. She served on the Board of Directors of CGS from 1984–1988, and during that period was also on the Executive Committee of the Association of Graduate Schools (AGS) in the Association of American Universities (AAU). She was President of AGS in 1988–89, and as she left that position, and her position as Graduate Dean, she shared her views on the deanship with some of her colleagues. We are very pleased to publish these remarks here, for the general benefit of the graduate community.

These remarks might more appropriately be entitled "Last Quacks of a Lame Duck Dean" since as many of you know, I relinquished my responsibilities as Dean of the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Columbia as of two weeks ago. I propose therefore to take advantage of my new freedom to share with you some observations on the exercise of decanal leadership based on my experiences over the past six years. These reflections are likely to be of value primarily to the newer deans (twenty-five percent of the deans assembled here are attending their first AGS meeting) leaving the senior "career deans"—the true professionals among us—free to chuckle at my arrogance in claiming such expertise after a mere half dozen years in office!

Gillian Lindt

I should make clear that I speak from the vantage point of someone who came from the ranks of the faculty and agreed to serve as Dean of the Graduate School with the understanding that my appointment would be for a fixed term rather than a permanent career move to university administration. I remain convinced that the advantages of such term appointments for the institution as well as the incumbent far outweigh their detriments. To cite a few:

1. As a fledgling dean you begin your appointment with the invaluable support and trust of your faculty who, perceiving you as a colleague, believe that you at least can still be expected to understand their needs.

2. The limits of a term of appointment provide the graduate school with built-in opportunities for the development of new ideas, initiatives and problem solving strategies at the very point when even the best of incumbent deans may have dismissed certain problems as intractable or incapable of resolution and are likely to have worn thin the support of a significant portion of their faculty.

3. The number and complexity of disciplines and Ph.D. programs that constitute the graduate school of a major research university today, encompassing anywhere from 50 to over a hundred programs, make it highly improbable that any one dean can adequately represent all of these constituencies. Term appointments facilitate the timely rotation of leadership of the school among the humanities as well as the sciences.

In my judgment these benefits outweigh the obvious disadvantage of losing the expertise of "seasoned" deans at a point at which they could still render valuable service.

Leadership Opportunities for the Graduate Dean

My choice of subject matter, the issue of leadership in the graduate school, was prompted by the following observation: at professional meetings such as these,

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graduate deans have been known to practice what anthropologists would identify as rituals of collective self-abasement: witness the tendency to engage in a certain amount of crying on one another's shoulders, bemoaning the failure of our faculty and students, and especially of our provosts and university presidents, to adequately understand, let alone respond to, the real needs of the graduate school. In so doing we in effect further, at least implicitly, the notion of our own powerlessness and lack of authority.

I want to counter this tendency by instead identifying ways and means whereby graduate deans, even those with limited formal authority, can play crucial leadership roles in advancing the interests of higher education. I shall address these matters from two vantage points: First, I want to clarify the concept of leadership and the place of power and authority within that role. This will enable us to identify formally some key dimensions of decanal leadership. Secondly, I want in a much more informal and anecdotal vein to share with you some reflections on a few decanal do's and don'ts that I learned the hard way, late, but better late than not at all.

The Character of Decanal Leadership

By decanal leadership we understand the process by which deans induce faculty, students, university administrators and alumni to further the educational goals that embody the shared values and aspirations of the graduate school. Such leadership involves the exercise of power within the service of an established academic community, but its domain is more limited that that of power. Many graduate schools have established statutes and bylaws that define precisely the specific responsibilities of the dean and thereby provide a blueprint of the authority that the university formally entrusts to the incumbent. I want to contrast such an understanding of the nature of decanal authority, exercised within the context of what Max Weber defined as a rational bureacracy, with the power that an individual occupying the position of dean can have over others.

Power, unlike authority, is exercised in order to realize the goals of the power wielder, irrespective of whether or not the graduate dean's goals are shared by the constituent faculty, students, alumni or fellow university administrators. The essence of decanal leadership, however, lies in the manner in which deans perceive and act on the values and interests of their faculty, students, and alumni. (Social scientists will recognize that I am using a formulation that draws heavily on the ideas of Burns and Weber.) Most of us would agree that graduate deans today tend to have limited authority. It does not follow from such a conclusion that graduate deans therefore have no real power or influence. Some have claimed that deans are inevitably limited in the range of leadership opportunities open to them—a point I wish to contest.

Academic definitions of leadership are one thing. The reality in which we work within universities, however, is determined to a much greater extent by the views of the dominant faculty, especially those in the tenured ranks. I would like to propose that their admittedly stereotypical view of a dean's role starts with the premise that it is they, the tenured faculty, who as officers of the corporation are the real leaders and decision makers in the university. According to this view graduate deans, and especially those who came from the ranks of the faculty, have abandoned their commitment to the primary mission of the University: research and teaching. The dean, in short, is someone who is to be tolerated at best as a bureaucrat, a paper pusher, whose primary responsibility is to ensure that the faculty continue to get the salary and other perquisites that they are entitled to and that in their judgment make them competitive with their peers.

The degree to which such a viewpoint is grounded in ignorance of what a dean really does was brought home to me a few months ago when I met with the search committee appointed to nominate my successor. I had been consulted about the membership of that committee and had included in my recommendations the name of a distinguished scientist who brought to this task not only strong academic credentials but who had also served as Vice Chair of the Graduate School's Executive Committee which makes all of the critical academic decisions approving new Ph.D. programs and/or suspending or closing down existing ones. When I met with the committee I was astounded to be asked by this person "Tell me Gillian, before we get to the business of whom we should be looking for, just what does a graduate dean do?" I should add that none of the other members on that committee had any clearer notion of what I had been doing these last six years, although each saw one part, but only one part of the much larger picture. As a follow-up to that meeting I sent the committee a written response in which I detailed the various responsibilities associated with my deanship. I did this, as any of you could do, by simply taking my calendar for the past year and using it to refresh my memory on the range of tasks and responsibilities, within the institution and outside, in which I had been involved. The number and diversity of these responsibilities took me by surprise though I came to understand more clearly why it is that most graduate deans put in such grueling hours.

Types of Leadership Roles

Let me now turn to the dimensions of leadership that are tied to the Office of the Dean:

1. *The dean as manager.* The faculty's perception of

our roles catches most fully the managerial role: The graduate dean is manager of a sizable operation including in many instances a faculty of several hundred, a couple of thousand graduate students, a staff of several dozen professionals, as well as a budget covering graduate student financial aid and in many places the university's research activities. For all of these operations the graduate dean bears responsibility. Managing such a bureaucracy clearly is an important task and those who fail to do so effectively, particularly with regard to fiscal matters, are not likely to remain in office very long. But an exclusively managerial view of the graduate dean's role is in my judgment based on too constricting a concept of decanal leadership and fails to address the more profound and longer range agendas of graduate research and education. Some of our provosts would be perfectly happy if that was all that we did, since by not rocking the boat, we make fewer demands on the provost's time and would thus be less likely to make new claims on the university's already scarce resources. Such a managerial concept of our responsibilities is bought at a price: it tends inevitably to encourage deans to take a passive and at best reactive position, responding to issues they are forced to confront rather than anticipating them. Management is, in short, a necessary but not sufficient condition for the exercise of leadership in the graduate school.

2. *The dean as mover and shaker.* When I first became dean I took the opportunity to browse the archival records of my predecessors, and mull over some of their personal papers, annual reports and correspondence. What I was struck by was how few of these deans, (I happen to be the eleventh dean appointed to the Graduate School) left a record that gave you a sense that they were doing anything more than managing the store; deans, in short, who left few traces in the history of American higher education. Those who defined their roles as movers and shakers stand out precisely because they are so different. Typically they tended to be founding figures or individuals who asserted leadership at major points of transition in the evolution of the graduate school. Not surprisingly these graduate deans usually went on to other leadership positions as provosts or university presidents. At Columbia, John Burgess, the founder of our Graduate School, who translated the model of European continental graduate education into an original American hybrid, had that sense of purpose and creativity that is at the core of all innovative leadership. Some of you may argue that there are no longer opportunities for graduate deans to be movers or shakers in the universities of today, on the grounds that we are all dominated by forces over which we have little or no control, be it the federal government, the state or even our own universities. That however is a position I am unwilling to accept. For in failing to exercise leadership in the drafting of new models of higher education, we in effect abrogate our responsibilities to those far less qualified to outline future directions.

3. *The dean as diplomat.* Let me turn then to a third dimension of leadership, that of the dean as a diplomat, mediator and negotiator because it is here that we have major opportunities for challenging and revitalizing the existing academic order within the graduate school and the university. By questioning, revising and amending academic goals and traditions, in subtle ways exercising all of our diplomatic skills, we can still succeed in changing outmoded practices far beyond what the formal authority entrusted to us would lead one to anticipate. It requires, however, a personal commitment to modesty and self-effacement and a readiness to give the credit to our faculty, to our alumni, and often to our provosts and presidents for initiatives that, truth be told, originated in the graduate school. Yet that is precisely what the diplomatic exercise of decanal leadership involves: furthering the goals of the graduate school embodied in the shared values and motivations of our diverse constituencies. I was surprised to discover how easy it often was to persuade faculty, students, alumni and university administrators to support new initiatives, providing you could convince them that these were their own.

4. *The dean as missionary.* If you ask me what in the end was the single most important dimension of the leadership entrusted to me over the last six years, it corresponds to none of the above. It is expressed rather in the idea of the graduate deanship as a vocation and comes down to advocacy. Advocacy is our calling, whether it is advocacy in terms of rational and highly pragmatic assessments of means and ends, or whether it takes the form of a more emotional appeal and articulation of the shared goals and aspirations of scholarship, research and teaching that are at the heart of the institutions we represent. This is precisely where the graduate dean occupies a unique vantage point, one which, as I came to realize, differs from those of our faculty, our students or our alumni. We alone have the opportunity on a daily basis to observe all of its constituent parts simultaneously—the opportunity to meet with faculty, newly-appointed professors as well as seasoned veterans, provide rich encounters with the faculty in action, and opportunities to hear first hand about what is percolating on the frontiers of our disciplines whether such knowledge be gained from introducing distinguished guest speakers, listening to the discussions of tenure review committees, or learning of the academic priorities articulated with fervor and vigor by our department chairs. We are reminded anew of the mission of our school as we listen to our graduate students telling us often in touching terms of their excitement, their hopes and fears in training for their future roles as scholar-teachers.

These four dimensions are not intended as alternative leadership options, although I recognize that each one of you is probably somewhat more comfortable in one or another of these roles. I want to argue rather that effective leadership in the graduate school needs to be exercised in all of these four domains if our graduate schools are truly to flourish. As I look to the future I am more convinced than ever that our graduate schools will require strong and dynamic leadership with a creative and contagious vision of the special role of graduate education if this country is to remain on the forefront of leadership of the world's research universities.

Ten Decanal Do's and Don'ts

Let me shift now in a more informal manner to a set of "off the cuff" reflections on leadership strategies that worked, at least for me, and that may be of some help to the newer deans while bemusing the more seasoned veterans. (I leave it to each of you to correct my list, adding and substituting as you see fit.)

1. *Make the most of your honeymoon—it will end sooner than you think.* Most deans are appointed to office with generous promises of support from presidents and provosts alike. Make sure you get those promises in writing. Ideally you should have anticipated your school's needs and obtained appropriate commitments of resources. But in a world that is less than perfect you are unlikely to be knowledgeable enough to know what to ask for at the point at which you are being offered the position. Your predecessor may or may not be in a position to share with you what those needs are. Cash in on whatever commitments were made as soon as you can, and certainly no later than the end of your second year. Given the mobility in university administration, the president who brought you on board may already have moved on, and successors are not likely to honor promises they never made. Senior administrators who do remain in place have been known to incur bouts of amnesia at the mention of past offers of support extended more than a year ago.

2. *Learn to move fast and to keep on moving.* Deans who, like myself, were recruited from the ranks of the faculty, must recognize that some of their scholastic training is likely to be dysfunctional for university administration. When I became dean I knew that we had a major problem with regard to inadequate graduate student financial aid. But with limited incremental resources it was not clear to me precisely where one should intervene first. So like a good social scientist I developed a pilot survey instrument and after testing it on one department, sent it out to all the divisions. By the time we had received and analyzed the responses, a year and a half had gone by. What I learned from that experience is that if you really took the time to give each problem the kind of detailed investigation that a research project entails you would find that by the time you are ready to act, the decision has already been made. Your inability to come to the point in a timely fashion enabled others to claim resources that could have been yours. The issues about which we have to make decisions keep changing, again requiring deans to be constantly on the move.

3. *Define your priorities early and stick to them.* It is better to do three things well than scratch the surface of a dozen. When you first take over the leadership of the graduate school, the needs and problems your predecessor failed to address, let alone resolve, will strike you as legion. Recognize, however, that within a limited term of office, even within a decade, there is just so much you can do. Once you have set those priorities, stick to them; you cannot afford to vacillate. Recognize, however, that issues you never expected to have to deal with will require much of your attention. In my own case, emerging IRS regulations on the taxation of graduate student fellowships and stipends constituted a subject about which you and I had to develop instant expertise. We learned in the process just how valuable the professional networking among AGS deans could be, with expert advice from John Vaughn and CGS's Tom Linney.

4. *Be frugal in your call on faculty expertise.* Learn to use your faculty's expertise in areas in which they have the requisite knowledge and interest. Recognize that even Nobel laureates can make fools of themselves if you permit them to pontificate on subjects they know little or nothing about. Coming from the faculty, I was in retrospect too ready initially to assume that "the faculty know best." For all of their perception of themselves as the key experts and decision makers in the university, we surely know that our faculty are the first to complain when we put them on committees. Even if they agree to serve, they may take revenge either by not showing up to meetings or by failing to give the tasks entrusted to them their proper care. Make use of the faculty less often, reserving their expertise for issues they know and care about.

5. *Take advantage of the latent benefits of committee memberships.* Gain appointment to as many key university committees and councils, (academic, budget, government relations, etc.) as you possibly can in the initial years of your appointment. Once you know the manner in which they work and who the power brokers are, get off as many as you can in your later years. Stay only on committees that bear most directly on the welfare of the graduate school. Remember that a formal table of organization of the university, like that of the graduate school, is an imperfect guide to how decisions are made. That is why the education you can obtain firsthand by serving on these committees in your early years is so important. If however, you re-

main too long you will find that your calendar is so cluttered with meetings that you will be left with no time to act on the knowledge you have gained.

6. *Silence is golden.* The less your fellow deans and in some cases faculty know about your appointments, including service on committees, the better. Knowledge is power and your fellow deans will quickly begin to resent, or worse still, insist on co-appointment to whatever committee you have served on. Competition, and in some cases, envy is likely to lead them to demand that they be granted the same appointment privileges that have been yours, whether or not the committee is as essential to the interests of their school as it is to yours. (If, however, you have followed my previous prescription, you will already have moved off by the time they have discovered your appointment to a key committee.)

7. *Take months, not years, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of your administrative staff and table of organization.* But once you've decided what changes need to be made, don't dither. Remember that everyone expects a new broom to sweep clean. Decisions on redundancy or termination for cause can generally be made more easily by a neophyte dean as yet unencumbered by ties of personal obligation or loyalty to past practices. A further reason for making such decisions reasonably early and then sticking to them relates to staff morale. Changes in personnel and the allocation of job responsibilities are likely in the short run to lower morale, leaving your staff wondering when and where the ax is going to fall next.

8. *Remind yourself that a dean who knows one graduate school knows none.* Let me illustrate the importance of this lesson with reference to the first AGS meeting I attended. It happened to be in Boston and President Derek Bok of Harvard was featured as the key luncheon speaker. Having read several of Bok's essays, I was looking forward to meeting him in person and to learning from the observations of so distinguished a leader of American higher education. Within the first five minutes of his address he singled out my university, rapidly proceeding to castigate its leadership, and accusing Columbia of what I took to be the worst sin an institution could commit—that of "pork barreling." I was bewildered and embarrassed by my own ignorance. At the end of his remarks a number of deans came up to me and offered their sympathies. I did not have the heart to admit to them that I did not know what pork barreling was, let alone where or how Columbia had benefited from so vile a practice. Well, I returned home and after careful questioning of key university administrators including the president, I had learned a great deal more about the practices and ethics of so-called pork barreling. But I also learned that my own president viewed the matter very differently from the way it had been portrayed by Bok, defending Columbia's funding of a new and long overdue chemistry building not as a violation of peer review but a consequence rather of the absence of such procedures for determining the allocation of funds for science facilities. Consultation with other AGS deans, greatly facilitated by these annual meetings, helps to ensure that the decisions we make for our own graduate school are grounded in a broader understanding of the way the issues are perceived and resolved in other research universities.

9. *Seek the advice of legal counsel, but treat it as advisory.* In dealing with faculty and student grievances you will need to seek advice of your legal counsel. But having sought that counsel I want to stress that you do not invariably have to follow it. Remember that the legal counsel's responsibilities for the welfare of the university are quite different from those entrusted to you. Had I always followed our lawyers' advice I would have been isolated and insulated from both faculty and students, leaving it to my staff to mediate and to seek to resolve all such grievances, reserving to myself only the role of reviewer of last resort. I continue to believe, however, that a great deal of mediation and resolution of conflicts of interests between faculty and students can more effectively be undertaken by a graduate dean and her staff precisely because we understand far better than our lawyers the intellectual climate and culture of the community of scholars within which we live. Recognize, however, that we deans cannot solve all of these grievances. Some will inevitably end up in the briefs of our lawyers and require intervention by the courts. But the financial costs to the university of those legal battles are staggering, consuming funds which might instead have been used for graduate support. Successful mediation and resolution of grievances by graduate deans thus can literally save the university thousands of dollars.

10. *Recognize when it's time to quit and always quit while you are ahead.* Don't succumb to the flattery of your staff, your faculty, or even your president, all insisting that you and you alone can do the job so effectively. Remember that they have a vested interest in keeping you on (except in cases of demonstrable incompetence or malfeasance) because you are a known quantity. To have to find a new dean involves additional work for everybody. Search committees are time consuming. You are thus likely to have been flattered for reasons that have little or nothing to do with a rigorous assessment of your leadership performance. To wit: once the news of my resignation was made public it was remarkable even to me how quickly those who had only weeks before insisted that I was absolutely indispensable, were already looking over my shoulder and learning to get along perfectly well without me. That is surely the ways things should be. But in the interests of the graduate school and the need to maintain the momentum of longer range academic

planning and development, keep the time between the official announcement of your resignation and the actual date of departure as short as possible. An extended period of lame duck leadership is to the advantage of no one.

Conclusion

I have spoken of the past and the present; what then of the future? I leave you with the conviction that if you as graduate deans can succeed in motivating bright young women and men to take their places in the ranks of tomorrow's professoriate we might just make it to Bill Bowen's year of 2012, and not only make it, but make it with flying colors. But to do so will require an extraordinary commitment of imagination, initiative and sheer hard work from graduate deans in recasting traditional equations of graduate faculty, student power and the allocation of scarce resources and responsibilities. The challenge is not simply one of replacing an aging faculty; rather your task will be to create a new faculty which increasingly must reflect the members of minorities previously excluded or underrepresented in the ranks of our professoriate. The formulation of these goals for the graduate schools and their realization will require far more than creative financing no matter how basic the fiscal underpinnings are to the welfare of our school. The graduate school's future will be increasingly dependent on a dean's creative vision and ability to communicate that vision of the life of the mind and of the rewards of research to those who live and work outside academia. Our graduate schools will depend on tough decisions on academic quality, on intellectual judgments and on considerations of equity and justice as to who will frame those choices and how those decisions will be made. If you do not rise to the challenge posed by these opportunities, others will surely step in and make decisions in your stead with far less knowledge and understanding of the underlying needs. That is the essence of the challenge and opportunities for leadership that now rest with you. My term as a member of AGS, and as its President, have come to an end. I thank each and every one of you for giving and sharing with me an extraordinarily challenging, on occasion frustrating, but never boring assignment.

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